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A single number to access all m-governance services

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By Zahra Khan

Photo: Bloomberg

Mumbai: Getting information from the government could be just a phone call or text message away. In the near future, all that one will have to do is dial 166 to avail of services or information from various government departments, including the Election Commission, health and social welfare departments.

The Mobile e-Governance Service Delivery Platform (MSDP) is an initiative by the department of electronics and information technology's Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC).

"This could be the future of information," said Manish Kumar, senior technical officer at CDAC, Mumbai.

Photo: Bloomberg

The project has just completed its first phase to check the working of the concepts, according to Kapil Kant Kamal, senior technical officer at CDAC.

The project, which began in April this year, is now at its "implementation phase" and aims to start operations in a full-fledged manner within a year. The implementation phase will continue for at least three years, said Kamal.

Pune-based CDAC started operations in 1988 to develop supercomputing infrastructure for India and eventually got involved with other activities, including language computing, graphics and mobile governance. Since then, CDAC has also emerged as a third-party research and development organization in information technology and electronics in the country working on strengthening the national technological capabilities.

MSDP is a part of the national e-governance plan to provide services to every citizen near their doorstep. With an increasing number of mobile phone users in the country, it has become possible to offer government services to all citizens. Currently, 80 central, state and government agencies have already been brought on board and 20 departments are in the process of being integrated with MSDP.

MSDP provides multiple mobile-based channels for delivery of services in the form of SMS gateway service, unstructured supplementary services data (USSD), interactive voice response system (IVRS) and mobile applications.

The SMS gateway and USSD-based services use messages to send information. On the other hand, IVRS is a way of communicating with the computer through the tones generated by a touch on the keypad. The last channel of delivery is the mobile applications and m-gov application store. This channel may be a little restricted in its reach and limited to smart phones and tablets.

The organization has been working with government departments and agencies, which provide them with data and also help spread awareness programmes in rural India.

"We also have a text-to-speech engine which reads the data out to you when you are browsing a website or using a mobile phone. And the unique code support helps make it available in six different languages." said Kamal.

The officers expect the proper implementation of the project to take another year.

The organization is completely government funded with the aim of bringing services closer to the citizens and not to make money, said Kumar. The three-digit number will soon become the common point of access to avail all government services. Currently, a short code number 51969 is available and is linked to all the telecommunication companies. Queries have to be sent to 51969 from where they will be directed to the state gateway and the particular department. The old number will be phased away making way for 166 to access all m-governance services.

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